



House Education Committee

July 15, 2009

Testimony of Chris Fisher

Associated Builders and Contractors of Michigan

Good morning Chairman Melton and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Chris Fisher and I am with Associated Builders and Contractors of Michigan. We are here in support of House Bill 4410.

ABC is a statewide trade association working in partnership with four separate ABC chapters throughout the state representing contractors, subcontractors, material suppliers and related firms in the commercial and industrial construction industry. Moreover we also offer educational and training opportunities.

A crucial part of our mission is to train our workforce to be skilled, motivated, and equipped to meet the demands of an ever-changing marketplace and meeting the challenges of both today and tomorrow.

Contractors turn to ABC and its educational facilities and partners throughout the state to train workers in electrical, carpentry, plumbing, heating, ventilating and air conditioning systems (HVAC), general construction, management and safety. At the four ABC chapters in Michigan students can take customized programs that cater to specific trades, including various levels of management, craft and apprenticeship training and assessment testing. Training in iron working, masonry, insulation and instrumentation is also available at certain chapters, as well as an increasing emphasis on green and sustainable building.

With the baby boomers poised to retire there will be a shortage of qualified and experienced people to sustain the industry's demands. Also, with the exit of so many highly experienced individuals with long tenures in the industry, positions up the ladder will be opening up as well, meaning that individuals choosing to enter the construction industry today will not only find themselves comfortable with strong job security, but also fortunate in the host of opportunities available to them to climb the career ladder.

In fact, the possibilities available to men and women entering the industry today are phenomenal. The sheer variety of different positions, firms, and specialties, combined with excellent prospects for the future, make construction a top industry for employment to people smart enough to realize its potential.

Yet, the current Michigan curriculum requirements endanger high school Career Technical Education even as the demand for skilled construction workers is expected to increase. We need to replace retiring workers with those who have the technical training to build and rebuild our communities and state.

Technical training in high school allows students to develop marketable job skills that are relevant for today and tomorrow's job market. Already both the federal government and the State of Michigan expect construction job openings to expand in the next decade. This bill addresses this reality by offering an additional pathway to a high school diploma that will enhance the Michigan Merit Curriculum with tougher standards than Michigan has had throughout its history in order to help meet these needs.

Current graduation requirements only focus on classes, geared to four-year college degrees. This has been a good start, however the requirements do not also include advanced CET offerings. Requirements that do not also include CET opportunities don't work for all students and we cannot afford to leave anyone behind by neglecting advanced CET offerings. Michigan's drop out rate is already much too high and without a rigorous technical career option some students may be more at risk to abandon their education altogether. So now is the time to take the next step to further enhance the Michigan Merit Curriculum by offering an additional pathway to graduation thus ensuring a talented, well prepared twenty first century workforce.

We appreciate and applaud the Legislature and Governor for beginning the process of adopting a 21st Century curriculum in our high schools. However, now is the time to finish the job for every student by preventing a one-size-fits-all approach and making sure that every student is able to succeed in a rewarding and valued career. Now is the time to finish the job by ensuring all students have access to a high school education that will prepare them for Michigan's new economy. An essential part of doing this is passage of this bill. Good careers and a strong economy depend upon it, and so do our students.

Once again, I would like to thank you Chairman Melton, and members of the Committee for the privilege to be here today. I would also like to thank Rep. Sheltrown for his tireless commitment to this crucial issue. I am happy to take any questions anyone may have.

ABC's craft training produces best and brightest

Training current and future construction workers to be highly skilled, safe, and efficient is what ABC's construction education accomplishments at an award-winning level.

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ABC offers marketable degrees

"ABC is where students can go for the other four-year degree," says ABC of Michigan President Chris Fisher. "We train craft professionals who are ready to have an impact on the job site often before they graduate. Our programs are considered the best in the state."

Central Michigan Chapter members **Scott** and **Pat Gillespie**, who are developing a number of significant projects in mid-Michigan, agree.

"ABC is well positioned to

promote the construction industry to younger people who are exploring

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nation's largest industries, according to the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. About 64 percent of the wage and salary jobs in construction are in specialty trades, plumbing, heating and air conditioning and electrical. In Michigan, construction workers accounted for about 136,300 jobs in December 2008. The Bureau of Labor Statistics also noted that construction maintains the most consistent job growth.

"The jobs are here," says Pat Gillespie. "We need to get and retain a skilled workforce. For those with the skills, the jobs are available." Many ABC facilities offer specific courses for safety training, including first aid and CPR, Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration (MSOSA) safety, fork truck and aerial lift safety and on-site construction safety. ABC's safety courses are updated regularly to address current safety regulations.

Safety is paramount in ABC programs

Safety begins in the ABC-sponsored classrooms. Says

Sharon Novaseli, vice president of marketing for Regency Group, which administers the ABC of Michigan Workers' Compensation Fund.

"I am sure there is a correlation between training and the safety records," says Novaseli. "In terms of underwriting, we look at the experience and history of the member, and the safety record is considered."

Last year the fund distributed more than \$1.8 million back to its members, thanks to a strong focus on accident prevention and proper claim management.

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ABC's Safety Training & Evaluation Process (STEP) was created in 1989 by the ABC National Environment Health & Safety (EH&S) Committee to recognize ABC member companies with exceptional safety records and assist contractors in evaluating and improving corporate safety practices. There are four levels of achievement in the STEP program. Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum. STEP Platinum recipients represent:

- Companies with a proven track record of safety—those who have achieved the STEP Gold or Platinum level the previous year
- Around 500 ABC member companies, or about 2 percent of all ABC members
- Companies with OSHA recordable incident rates well below the national average

STEP awards are presented annually in the four categories. Each year, more than 2,000 contractors of various sizes participate in the STEP program.

ABC students are often first choice for jobs

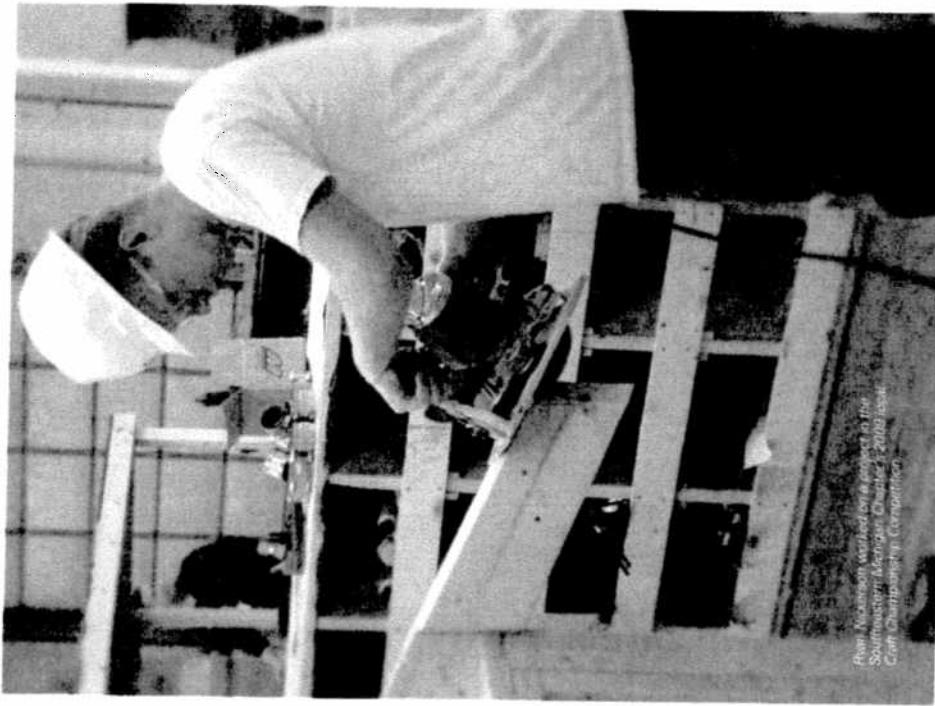
Students are in the field all day," he explains. "At night they use the lab, because sometimes residential plumbers deal only in PVC and PEX tubing, and they don't see the copper pipes used in commercial plumbing."

Stone says core curriculum focuses solely on safety during the initial instruction phase at M-TEC. "Every person who comes to work here goes through safety certification," he says.

The educational programs at the Western Michigan Chapter are conducted through a partnership forged with the college five years ago, although ABC still has considerable input into the curriculum and assists in an advisory role.

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very well to be working in the trade."

"They're learning while they're earning," adds Sawyer. "Of the high school graduates in Michigan, 74 percent continue on to college. Of that 4 percent, only 24 earn a degree, and how many of that 24 percent will work in the field for which they trained? Our graduates are all working in the trade for which they trained," he says.

Quality instruction makes the difference

Dan Gonzalez is an ABC graduate who parlayed his education into a successful teaching career.

"I worked with other electricians who took courses at other programs," explains the job leader with **Douglas Electric** in Wyandotte. "Hands down, ABC is superior."

Gonzalez contends a high quality education begins with the instructors. "ABC teachers are working electricians. Many are inspectors, and they know the trade inside out," he says.

Saginaw Valley program trains in 10 fields
At the Saginaw Valley Chapter in Midland, the ABC Construction

Academy provides apprenticeship training in 10 fields, as well as core instruction in construction safety, hand and power tools, blueprints, construction math and more. Training is split between the ABC Academy and nearby Delta College. The charter has offered training for more than 20 years and began NCCER-accredited classes 12 years ago.

"The text is put together by experts in each particular field and reviewed by those experts every three years to keep up with changes," says **James Kubik**, Saginaw Valley Chapter director of education. "It's a very rich curriculum. A student can take an ABC Academy class in Michigan and transfer to another school anywhere in the nation."

Brian Kretz is a 2007 graduate of the midnight program at the Saginaw Valley facility and a craft

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The jobs are there if we can retain a skilled workforce. For those with the skills, the jobs are available.

-Pat Gillespie

Certain trades have a public safety component to them," explains chapter President **John Doherty. "Students obtain listing electrical, plumbing, boiler repair and elevator maintenance as examples. Students obtain hours and on-the-job training before finishing the apprenticeship program. They take their exam in the third year and some might say, 'That's my ticket' and drop out," say Doherty. "We encourage them to go the full term, because their diploma or certificate of graduation from the four-year program gives them a document attesting to their skills."**

Although some license laws vary from state to state, students can take their diploma anywhere and expect to be hired.

In addition to the apprenticeship classes, most ABC sites offer advanced instruction in safety,

Southeastern Michigan program is among state's largest
Southeastern Michigan Chapter's Director of Education **Carol Eberhardt**

Onslow Sheffield Inc.'s Daniel Cohan, a carpentry student from the Southeastern Michigan Chapter, competes in the 2008 ABC National Competition in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

says craft training there is unique, in that students get classroom training, hands-on instruction and learn via the Internet.

"Our students are really helped by online training," Eberhardt explains. "It allows people who learn in different ways to succeed. Some learn by listening or watching a video rather than reading a book."

Students in ABC classes are often already working for members of the association, since requirements for their journeyman qualification require 8,000 hours of on-the-job training, making their skills even more marketable.

"Students usually pick up work in their trade before they finish their education," Eberhardt says. "Member contractors look to our school for employees. When our students graduate, they are armed

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ABC education students earn awards

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- Second Place, Silver Medal Winner: **Timothy Turner of Three Rivers Corporation** in Plastering.
 - Third Place, Bronze Medal Winner: **Cody Green of Three Rivers Corporation** in Carpentry. In addition, **John Roberts, with Three Rivers Corporation** was named one of six ABC National Craft Professionals of the Year and was the top carpenter in the field.
 - **Gerald Kenyon**, a millwright instructor at the Saginaw Valley Chapter, was honored as national Craft Instructor of the Year in 2007. Also, **Mike Pope**, an insulation instructor with the Saginaw Valley Chapter's Construction Academy and an employee of **G.E. Insulation**, was named the 2009 ABC National Craft Instructor of the Year. The award is given to the instructor who possesses outstanding teaching competitive," he says. "We get our people through in four years, while some other programs are looking at five years to get through the apprenticeship instruction." Hannahs notes that they have had very few injuries in the past few years, and those only minor.
 - Classes at the Central Michigan Chapter in Lansing are limited to a four-year course leading to a journeyman's license in electric Chapter President **Russ Cunningham** says the facility could soon expand to include HVAC and carpentry.
 - **ABC students shine in annual craft competitions** Another measure of education excellence is success in "craft competition" in which students pit
- competition champion **Bierlein Construction Co.** hired him and sent him through ABC training. "I did have some knowledge in the field beforehand, and I hired in knowing that I would be put through the program," explains Kretz. "They paid my tuition and books, and the time I spent in the classroom was my own time. That is the key to it being a successful program. I was working in the field while I was learning."**
- Central Michigan program is growing** **Corey Hannahs**, vice president of **Integrity Electric** in Lansing and an instructor at the school, believes the instruction offered at the Central Michigan Chapter facility in Lansing is excellent. "Across the board, we are very
- competitive," he says. "We get our people through in four years, while some other programs are looking at five years to get through the apprenticeship instruction." Hannahs notes that they have had very few injuries in the past few years, and those only minor.**
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- ABC students shine in annual craft competitions** Another measure of education excellence is success in "craft competition" in which students pit

their skills against their peers and welcome the critiques of judges. Local craft championships include a written exam followed by hands-on competition in carpentry, electrical, fire sprinkler, HVAC, insulation, metal building, millwright, plumbing, pipefitting, sheet metal and welding. Top winners in local competitions go to the national level, during which more than 100 final competitors vie for top awards.

Brian Kretz earned a gold medal in 2006 and Gonzalez took third place in the national competition in 2007. Several new 2009 Craft Champions are also from the Saginaw Valley Chapter program. They include:

The First Place, Gold Medal Winner: Aaron Marker of Gulf States, Inc. in Millwright.

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construction workforce demands will change as people near retirement," Fisher explains. "Even if the economy doesn't rebound right away, there is still a need for highly trained people to fill those jobs."

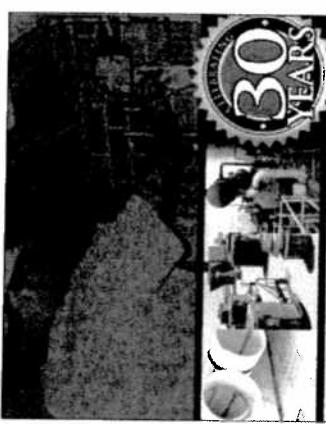
Fisher says ABC has positioned itself to be able to offer quality

commitment to preserving the high educational standards of the meat shop and construction industry. Kenyon previously had served as a millwright subject matter expert for the chapter's Craft Championships, creating the 50-question written

exam and designing the three-hour hands-on competition.

Meanwhile, Fisher says that while the construction business is down in Michigan, the need for trained workers on job sites continues to grow.

"There is an expectation that



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